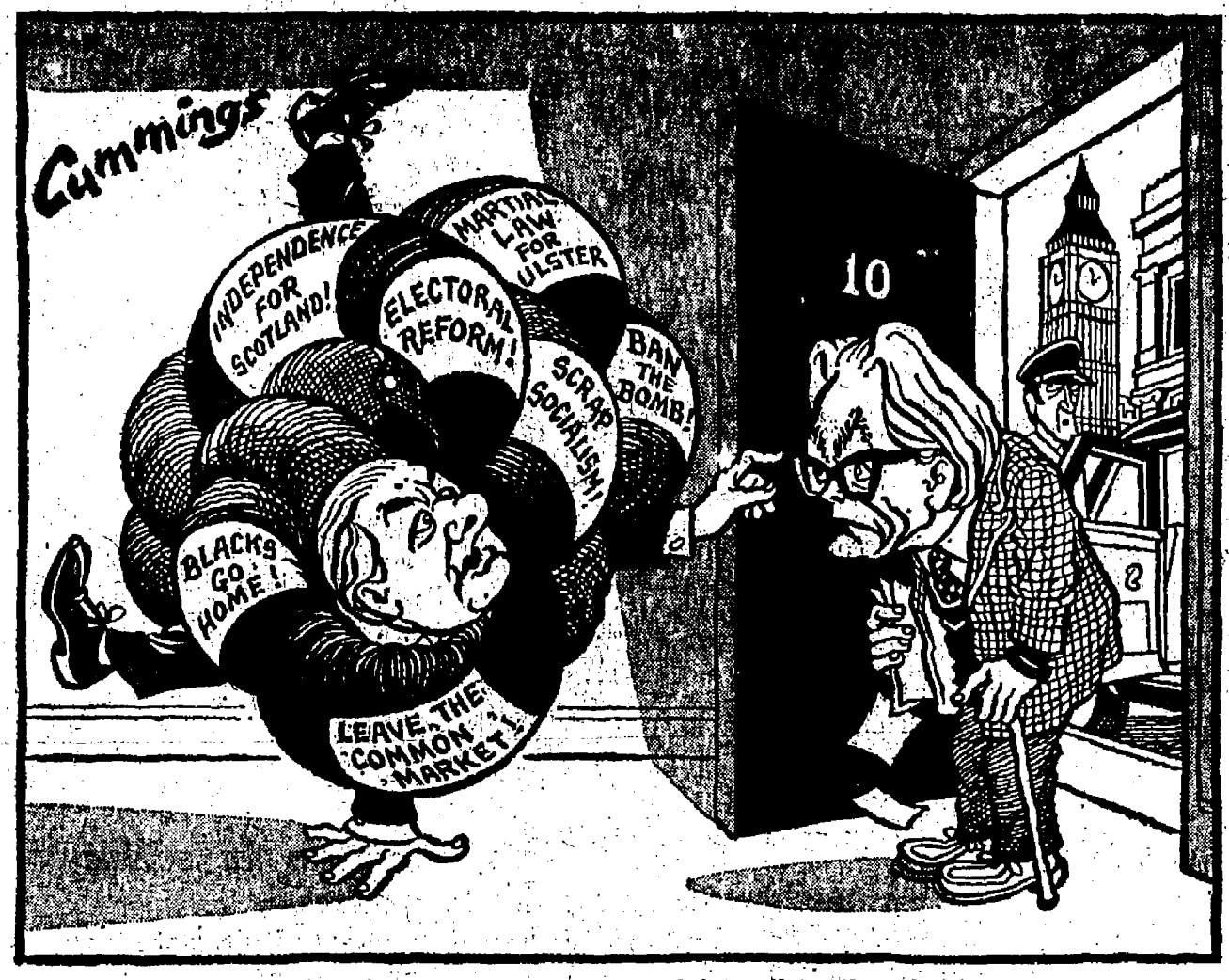

"I'll have to vote on a stretcher—I've slipped a disc while doing a deal with everybody!"

Herman—prophet of boom

By Janice Morley

I AM pouring Herman Kahn a cup of coffee in the cloistered calm of the Grosvenor House hotel.

He, in turn, is telling me the story of some British colonel whose courage was a hero's tale and whose cold heart was a legend: "He sat down to tea with me and asked if he should be mum."

It is an amusing little anecdote and one of many similar humorous asides he had been making during the morning while addressing nearly 200 top management men.

British executives who had paid £60 each to hear Mr. Kahn, one of America's professional thinkers, predict what would happen in the next ten years.

Something which struck me as rather amusing, as we don't even know what is going to happen to us in the next two days.

Mr. Kahn, is the founding director of the Hudson Institute, a scientist who 10 years ago achieved fame as author of "The Year 2000," and who has recently written "The Next 200 Years," with collaborators at the institute.

Leadership

Our current unrest does not deter Mr. Kahn—in fact he would rather welcome a change of leadership. "Britain, more than any other country, needs to break with the past," he says. "At the moment you do not have the leadership to make this break.

"Someone who is willing to enforce his beliefs, come down hard, get voted out, and come back to lead.

"The trouble is, you have not got someone willing to lose his first election." He was not, he said, referring to Mr. Heath—only you got the impression that he was.

Mr. Kahn's conviction that strong personalities can produce results can have no finer example than himself.

A man, who was brought up in Los Angeles, working in a local grocery store as a boy, then as a telephone linesman in the Army during the war before hitting the academic springboard at the Californian Institute of Technology and soaring to the top.

Now, this pleasant and unpretentious prophet lives just outside New York with his wife and two children running the Institute he formed in 1960.

Occasionally he comes to England and persuades us that paying £60 for a ticket to his conference is productive.

So what advice do we get for £60?

"You have the wrong attitude," he says. "On the Continent, in Germany, people believe they are all part of the growing pie, that the bigger it gets the larger slice for each of them.

"In England you will not work together like this. There is still too much jealousy of individual achievement. It will take more than 10 years to correct this because children need to be taught this philosophy in the schools."

What would he do immediately?

"I would tell Mr. Healey that out of sheer decency he should revise the tax system. It is disgraceful. You cannot penalise people for earning income. It ruins their will to work."

"You have to accept that, you are a poor country—but you have also got to say that you won't accept things as they are. If enough people say it and go on saying it, Britain might get the management it deserves."

Mr. Kahn, having corrected, in theory, our lemming-like leap into the next ten years, goes back to fire his audience with enthusiasm.

Who are the people who need such enthusiasm?

Affluent

Tony Andrews for one, a buying general manager for the successful, privately-owned, Grattan Warehouses, mail order firm.

"It makes a lot of difference to us to know, for instance, that we are going to have an affluent, leisure-orientated society."

Richard Graham, from the personnel planning unit of the nationalised British Airways: "I am an incurable optimist and Herman Kahn is the business man's guru who gives people like me encouragement.

"He believes in the individual, in breaking down the large industries into divisions that can be handled. He has not forgotten human beings.

"Yes, I came here to be encouraged and stimulated to work out the future for myself."

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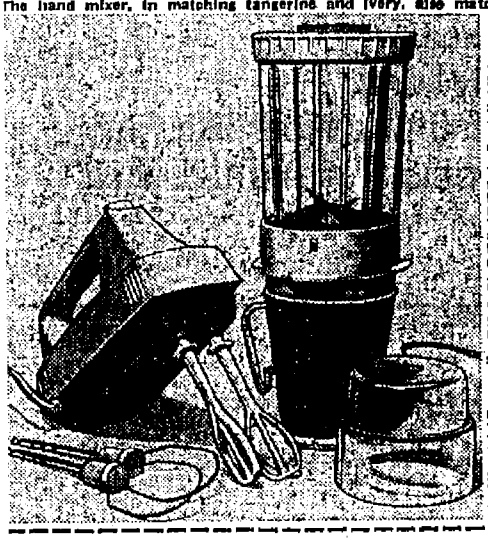

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GEORGE GALE

Schools for scandal

WE ARE all invited to take part in what is fancifully called the Great Education Debate, which, under the amiable aegis of trendy Shirley Williams with the unkempt hair, has been neither great nor much of a debate.

The educational vandalism which has been encouraged to rampage through our schools for the past 20 years has been of benefit only to teachers who lack the ability to instruct children formally and to children who flourish in undisciplined situations.

The great debate ought to be about two entirely different matters: the comprehensive system of schools and what it implies on the one hand, and methods of instruction and educational standards on the other. Unfortunately, the two matters have been inextricably confused from the beginning, and to make matters worse, the debate —if that is the word for a very stage-managed series of set-pieces—has been conducted by teachers and their union representatives, by educationists and bureaucrats and by local committee men. They debate their own mistakes and make a further muddle out of the mess they have created.

A comprehensive school, if it is big enough, could theoretically educate all its children to their best possible advantage, by rigorously streaming pupils according to their abilities and inclinations and instructing them accordingly. But schools taking in all the children from inner cities would have to be huge to garner in sufficient gifted children to make up an efficient sixth-form. They would be, and often are, unmanageably large.

However, the true and political purpose of comprehensive education is not to educate children to their best possible advantage, but to use the more gifted to help the less gifted. Excellence is sacrificed to mediocrity in the name of equality.

The gifted child

In the suburbs matters are not too bad, for each comprehensive school's catchment area contains proportionately more gifted children and more educated parents than do inner city areas. The child who suffers most is the gifted child from the slums; the child who suffers least is the average suburban one.

Educational standards suffer when the talents of the most gifted are thwarted and their educational progress deliberately held back. Comprehensive education would secure this on its own, particularly in the inner cities. But the new methods of instruction and theories of education have powerfully reinforced the unavoidable academic failure of the inner city comprehensives, and turned many suburban comprehensives into institutions of indiscipline, as last night's Panorama showed.

Parents know it. Statistics prove it. Politicians sense it. Employers discover it. Too many teachers and educationists deny, discount or seek to conceal it. And children suffer from it.

Successive Ministers of Education have used the power of the purse to compel education authorities to go comprehensive. Why not use that same power to compel the comprehensive schools they have called into being, to teach all their children how to read and write and do simple sums?

I do not advocate a return to learning by rote. All I ask is the imposition of educational standards through national tests and a common basic curriculum. Since the schools clearly will not impose such standards on themselves, they must be imposed from above. Methods of teaching may be left to the teachers, and the organisation of schools to education authorities, so long as the schooling produces educated children and above all encourages the gifted to strive for excellence.